



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 2332

Luke 23:42 "And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom.'"

. Biblically, we understand that there wasn't just one day in the year that the disciples thought about the resurrection. They were never more than a few days away from remembering. Each Sunday, every first day of the week, brought thoughts of the Lord's death and resurrection to those first Christians. The Lord's Supper pulls us close to the cross. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the central theme of the Bible. Without that event, nothing else really matters.

Our verse today comes from the Calvary scene. It's a conversation between the one thief and Jesus. There has been a change of heart. At first, both thieves were ridiculing Jesus. But as death nears, one stops. He not only stops the verbal abuse, he rebukes his comrade in crime for his continuation of the abuse. He defends Jesus and acknowledges that the Lord is innocent. It didn't take a sermon on the mount for him to reach this conclusion. It didn't take seeing the blind healed or demons cast out to reach that conclusion. The events swirling around the cross and the disposition of Jesus was all it took. He knew. He then speaks to Jesus. This is our verse today.

Several things to notice:

First, he believed in life after death. Every man, all three of them, on those crosses were dying. So, we have one dying man speaking to another dying man. Even if some how Jesus overcame death, it was not looking good for this thief. He wasn't going to make it. He knew that beyond the door of death, there was something else. Remember me, can only happen if we are still capable of doing that after death. Death wasn't the end. He knew that.

Second, he understood that the kingdom was Jesus'. "Your kingdom," is what he said. Not our kingdom. Not Rome's kingdom. Your kingdom. Jesus was dying, yet, some how this wasn't going to alter His kingdom. Most times, when a king is killed, it is no longer his kingdom. The power shifts. It goes to the next in line. Here, Jesus was dying, but it was still going to be His kingdom after death. This kingdom was different.

Third, he knew that Jesus was coming. He's coming in His kingdom. Death wasn't changing the plans of Jesus. Jesus was greater than death. Incredible faith and incredible confession.

Fourth, he wanted to be a part of that kingdom. Asking, "remember me," implies find me a place in this future kingdom. Don't forget me. Don't leave me out. His years of crime didn't give him what the kingdom of Jesus would. Hope wasn't in a selfish crime. Hope was in Jesus.

(OVER)

Fifth, Jesus did not stop his death. The Lord had the power. He could have saved the thief from death and still died Himself. He didn't. All three men died that day. One died a criminal. One died a Savior. One died saved from his sins.

Finally, Jesus assures him and promises him that he would be with Jesus. "Today, you will be with me." Not some day. Not, it's too late for you. Not you will be ok. But, we will be together. Where I am, you will be. Today, we will be in paradise. I can only imagine, as the final breaths and thoughts were leaving this penitent thief, that maybe a smile crossed his face. It would be ok. He's going to be with Jesus. The Lord would take care of him. He would not be forgotten. He may not fully understood what Paradise was, but Jesus was going to be there and that's all that mattered. Likely, his body was tossed in a pauper's grave. There wasn't much honor for a condemned thief that is executed by the state. Jesus' went to the tomb of a rich man. Separate in burial, their souls were together in the next world.

We don't know the background of this thief. He took the wrong turn in life. If Jewish, he ignored the commands of the Law. He lived selfishly and took advantage of others, just the very opposite of the way Jesus lived. He gave little thought to helping others, as Jesus had.

What is remarkable is that this thief probably didn't know how to pray as Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount. He probably didn't know about the church. He may not have understood the prophecies that were being fulfilled right before his eyes. So much he didn't know. But what he did know was that he was dying, Jesus was innocent and he wanted to be with Jesus.

I wonder if we make conversion too much like an entrance exam to college. We load tons of things in a confused mind and expect the person to grasp grand concepts that they may never had heard before. Now, this is not giving a pass on ignorance. The teaching apostles remind us of the need to grow and know God's word. But if this thief showed up at our church building on a Sunday morning and simply said, "Jesus is innocent and I want to be with Him," would that be enough or would we feel compelled to sit him down and give him thirteen lessons about discipleship?

I also wonder, if this guy showed up, and we knew that he was a thief, but he's telling us that he has changed, would we believe him? Would we "keep an eye on him?" Jesus was on the cross just a few hours. And, in those few hours this thief went from being critical of Jesus, to being a believer in Jesus. It happened fast, really fast. Almost, too fast for some of us.

I also wonder if a guy who has "done time" showed up on Sunday, what we would think? Even in His final breaths, Jesus was saving folks. This is what He came to do. I'd like to think until our final breath, that we are busy in the kingdom as well.

What's it going to take for some to believe Jesus? What's it going to take for some to get serious about their lives? What's it going to take for some to change their ways?

Powerful stuff from a few words between two dying men.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)

Keep in your prayers this week:

Jane Johnson- has several blood clots in her body the Dr.s are trying to cope with. Very serious stuff here!!!!.

Joy Markus- had a heart pace maker put in this week. Pray that this will take care of her heart problems.

Be sure to see if there is anything you can do to help these sisters in Christ.
